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Mlada Čehinja kriči na sovjetske vojake na tanku med invazijo na Češkoslovaško pod sovjetskim vodstvom v Pragi 26. avgusta 1968 (arhiv BettmannGetty Images) / Una giovane donna ceca urla contro i soldati sovietici su un carro armato durante l'invasione della Cecoslovacchia da parte dei sovietici, a Praga il 26 agosto 1968 (Archivio BettmannGetty Images) / A young Czech woman shouts at Soviet soldiers on a tank during the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia, in Prague on Aug. 26, 1968 (BettmannGetty Images Archive).

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VSEBINA / INDICE GENERALE / CONTENTS

- Boštjan Udovič & Lara Sorgo:** Giuseppe Tartini: soltanto un'attrazione culturale locale o un ponte diplomatico verso gli altri Paesi? 183
Giuseppe Tartini: Just a Local Cultural Product or a Possible Tool of Slovenian Cultural Diplomacy?
Giuseppe Tartini: lokalna kulturna znamenitost ali sredstvo slovenske kulturne diplomacije do drugih držav?
- Stanislav Južnič:** The Forgotten Trieste Bishop Wolfgang Weickhard von Rain (1721–1724) and His Relatives 211
Il vescovo triestino dimenticato Wolfgang Weickhard von Rain (1721–1724) e la sua famiglia
Pozabljeni tržaški škof Volf Vajkard Rain (1721–1724) in njegovo sorodstvo
- Polona Tratnik:** “Hansel and Gretel”: The Abandoned Children Become Enlightened Social Subjects 231
«Hansel e Gretel»: i bambini abbandonati diventano soggetti sociali illuminati
»Janko in Metka«: zapuščena otroka postaneta razsvetljena družbena subjekta
- Matteo Perissinotto:** «Nel ‘demi-monde’ della cocaina»: traffico e consumo di cocaina nella Venezia Giulia (1918–1923) 251
“In the ‘Demi-Monde’ of Cocaine”: Cocaine Trafficking and Consumption in the Julian March (1918–1923)
»V ‚polsvetu‘ kokaina«: trgovina s kokainom in njegova poraba v Julijski krajini (1918–1923)
- Matic Batič:** Nova govorica prostora: preimenovanja naselij na severnem Primorskem po drugi svetovni vojni (1948–1954) 281
Il nuovo linguaggio dell’ambiente: modifiche dei toponimi sul litorale settentrionale sloveno nel secondo dopoguerra (1948–1954)
The New Language of Space: The Renaming of Settlements in Northern Primorska after the Second World War (1948–1954)

Blaž Torkar & Stanislav Polnar: The Impact of the 1968 Prague Spring on Czechoslovak and Yugoslav Military Doctrines 307
L'impatto della primavera di Praga del 1968 sulle dottrine militari della Cecoslovacchia e della Jugoslavia
Vpliv praške pomladi 1968 na češkoslovaško in jugoslovansko vojaško doktrino

Mila Orlić: Talijansko javno pamćenje i slika drugog: antislavenski stereotipi u recentnoj historiografiji i književnosti sjevernojadranskog prostora 333
Memoria pubblica italiana e rappresentazioni dell'altro: stereotipi antislavi nella recente storiografia e letteratura dell'area alto adriatica
Italian Public Memory and Representations of the Other: Anti-Slavic Stereotypes in Recent Italian Historiography and Literature of the Upper Adriatic Area

OCENE

RECENSIONI

REVIEWS

Eleanor Janega: The Once and Future Sex: Going Medieval on Women's Roles in Society
(Veronika Kos) 355

Joseph Lennon: Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History
(Li Gengming & Hamid Farahmandian) 359

“HANSEL AND GRETEL”: THE ABANDONED CHILDREN BECOME ENLIGHTENED SOCIAL SUBJECTS

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ABSTRACT

“Hansel and Gretel” begins with the parents’ decision to abandon their children. The author argues that the differences in how the children survive their exile reflect the changes in how modern societies conceptualized their organization. An early baroque tale speaks of a contracted civil society and legitimizes sovereign power, while later versions represent Enlightened social subjects capable of emerging from their minority. The motif of abandoned children reaches back to Roman antiquity, where it was linked to mimetic rivalry. The author shows in what ways mimetic rivalry appears in modern fairy tales.

Keywords: fairy tale, Hansel and Gretel, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Charles Perrault, Giambattista Basile, Martin Montanus, Enlightenment

«HANSEL E GRETEL»: I BAMBINI ABBANDONATI DIVENTANO SOGGETTI SOCIALI ILLUMINATI

SINTESI

La fiaba «Hansel e Gretel» comincia con la decisione dei genitori di abbandonare i propri figli. L’autrice del contributo sostiene che le differenze nel modo in cui i bambini sopravvivono all’esilio riflettono i cambiamenti nel modo in cui la società moderna concepiva la propria organizzazione. La versione della fiaba del primo barocco parla di una società civile con un contratto sociale e legittima il potere sovrano, mentre le varianti successive rappresentano soggetti sociali illuminati capaci di uscire dalla loro minorità. Il motivo dei bambini abbandonati risale all’epoca romana, in cui era legato alla rivalità mimetica. L’autrice espone i modi in cui la rivalità mimetica si manifesta nelle fiabe moderne.

Parole chiave: fiaba, Hansel e Gretel, Jacob e Wilhelm Grimm, Charles Perrault, Giambattista Basile, Martin Montanus, Illuminismo

INTRODUCTION

“Hansel and Gretel” is considered to be a so-called “classic” fairy tale familiar to everybody. The authorship is attributed to Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, who published the tale under this title.¹ At the same time, it is considered a German folktale. Neither is exactly true. The story the brothers collected did not originate from the peasantry, but was told to Wilhelm Grimm by his future wife, Dorthen Wild, who was an educated, middle-class young woman, some time between 1808 and 1810. In 1808 Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm visited the Haxthausen estate in Westphalia where they collected tales from a group of men and women. Young women from the Wild family (Dorthen, Gretchen, Lisette, and Marie Elisabeth) and their mother, Dorothea, as well as young women (Ludowine, Jeanette, and Marie) from the Hassenpflug family regularly gathered to relate tales they had read or heard from their nursemaids, governesses, and servants. Many of the tales the Grimms collected were French in origin as the Hasenpflugs were of Huguenot ancestry and spoke French at home. The French also occupied the Rhineland during that time, thus accounting for the strong French influence throughout the region (Zipes, 2001, 866). Wilhelm took down the tale of “The Little Brother and Little Sister” (“Das Brüderchen vnd das Schwesterchen”) as it was initially titled, and the brothers Grimm edited and revised it numerous times. Their last version from 1857 is now considered to be the most “original” (Zipes, 2010, 198), which means this is neither the version told by the storyteller, nor the first version published by the authors (Zipes, 1997, 42). In addition, there were similar tales published before the nineteenth century by Charles Perrault, Giambattista Basile and Martin Montanus. Perrault’s tales were known in the region where they recorded the tale (Böhm-Korff, 1991, 20) and Wilhelm had read Stöber’s Alsatian tale “The Little Pancake House” (*Elsässisches Volksbüchlein*, 1842), from which he appropriated certain phrases, sayings, and verses in the fifth edition of 1843, when most the dramatic changes occurred (Zipes, 1997, 43–44).

The plot of “Hansel and Gretel” by the brothers Grimm begins with the parents’ decision to abandon their children. Because little children would have practically no chance of survival in the wilderness, such abandonment seems to equal to murder. This tale is striking precisely because of this motif which launches the plot.

The motif of the abandonment of children was actually very wide-spread in antiquity, but organized a bit differently and not with poor parents who were no longer capable of maintaining their children. Many mythological tales tell of abandoned infants wherein the abandonment is usually related to a struggle for the throne. The legend of Romulus and Remus speaks of infant twins that were ordered thrown into

1 The article results from research conducted within the project N6-0268 Political Functions of Folktales, program P6-0435 The Practices of Conflict Resolution between Customary and Statutory Law in the Area of Today’s Slovenia and Neighboring Countries and project J6-3140 Slovenian intellectual history in the light of modern theories of religion: from the separation of spirits and cultural struggle to the communist revolution, funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS).



Fig. 1: Ludwig Emil Grimm, illustration of Hänsel behind the bars from "Hänsel und Gretel" (Grimm, 1825, 89).

the Tiber River by their old uncle, who had usurped the throne. They were rescued by a she-wolf who suckled them.

Three points may be made in relation to this legend which has connections with the modern variants of the tale of abandoned children. First, the children were shown mercy in that they were not killed, and were left in the wilderness instead. This apparently tiny difference between being killed and being left in the wilderness as small children seems equal to murder, is represented as a signifi-

cant difference between death and having a chance to survive. This alternative is actually the alternative between death or exile, which is repeated several times in Sophocles' *King Oedipus*, because both options are so tightly linked that in primordial communities, exile almost always meant death, not only because of wild animal attacks or a lack of food, but because primordial man could not survive exile from a community because of total isolation and loneliness (Hribar, 1998, 5). Children seem to have even less of a chance of surviving exile than adults. The abandonment of children is a sort of exile. Tales about abandoned children speak about those minimal chances the children have for survival, but which they use to survive. The plot thus evolves around their survival in extreme existential conditions, with security and caretaking having been withdrawn from them. Centuries later with the setting of children being abandoned by their parents in the forest, this initial situation remains the same as a general framework. Secondly, in the ancient legend of Romulus and Remus, the wolf appears as a surrogate mother, while wolves also appear in tales about abandoned children published by the Grimms, Perrault and Basile. In those cases, wolves do not represent sanctuary for children, but quite the contrary, they are represented as an existential threat, yet one that never really comes to fruition. This change in the representation of wolves could be interpreted as showing the change in the conceptualization of an organized society that provides contracted security to the social subjects as compared to the natural state, which is a state of permanent danger and war. Third, after the twins were saved by the she-wolf, the legend of Romulus and Remus continues with the rivalry between the brothers. Finally, one is killed and the other becomes the political sovereign. René Girard interprets the situation as a mimetic rivalry, in which the rivalry is established from imitating the model and the model becomes a rival. Rivalry results in the initial collective murder, which functions as a basis for the community (Girard, 1986, 88–94). The mimetic rivalry or the situation with the protagonist as a model and the rival actually re-appear in modern versions of the tales about abandoned children.

BROTHER AND SISTER ABANDONED BY THEIR PARENTS AND SECURED BY THE PRINCE

The version that appeared in the Grimms' 1810 manuscript mentions a very poor woodcutter who could hardly continue to maintain his wife and his two children. His wife suggested he should take the children into the woods and leave them there. For long he resisted this suggestion, but finally he agreed (Bedenk & Blažić, 2018, 29). Zipes argues that the Grimms rationalized the abandonment through the embellishment of the text, the introduction of Christian motifs, the representation of social reality and the erasure of the mother and the depiction of the witch. This rationalization in his view also defines the manner we receive this tale up to the present (Zipes, 1997, 39–60). In Germany, "Hansel and Gretel" has remained the most popular of the Grimms' fairy tales (Böhm-Korff, 1991, 7).

Maria Tatar believes this motif originates from an age marked by wars, plague, and famine and refers to the cultural historical analysis of Robert Darnton (Tatar, 2012, 73). Darnton discussed the earlier French tale by Charles Perrault, "Little Thumbling" (or "Tom Thumb"), written in the mid-1690s, at the height of the worst demographic crisis in the seventeenth century, from the period that lasted for four centuries (from the first ravages of the Black Death in 1347 to the first great leap in population and productivity in the 1730s), when "[g]reat masses of people lived in a state of chronic malnutrition." (Darnton, 1999, 24). Mothers would neglect their infants they could not feed so that they would become sick and die. In a similar manner Little Thumbling's parents were "trying to cope with a problem that overwhelmed the peasantry many times in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—the problem of survival during a period of demographic disaster" (Darnton, 1999, 30). Darnton noticed that the same motif exists in the peasant versions of the tale and in other tales, along with other forms of infanticide and child abuse. It is not necessarily the case that folktales were transferred into aristocratic culture. Literary fairy tales were also translated into folktales when they traversed from an aristocratic context to the peasant one, as Charlotte Trinquet has shown (Trinquet). Dire economic crisis seemed to justify parents abandoning their children when they found themselves in a situation without prospects in order to ensure their own survival. Great poverty as a demographic issue expanded throughout centuries of European history and was still an issue in the times of the Grimms. This would explain why this meme remained relevant until then, yet the question remains, why does this motif persist until the present day? Bruno Bettelheim provides a psychoanalytic interpretation of the split of the mother into two personalities: the real mother, who is all-good and "represents the source of all food to children," (Bettelheim, 1976, 159) and the "false parent," who becomes her evil counterpart, expressed in the figures of the stepmother and the witch. "The fantasy of the wicked stepmother not only preserves the good mother intact, it also prevents having to feel guilty about one's angry thoughts and wishes about her – a guilt which would seriously interfere with the good relation to Mother" (Bettelheim, 1976, 68–69). In Bettelheim's view, the tale addresses the child's anxious fantasies about starving to death, where abandonment represents a mother weaning a child from breast-feeding and the tale speaks of the initiation of a child into an independent person by meeting the world (Bettelheim, 1976, 159). For this reason, this tale is supposed to have a universal relevance for growing children. This interpretation, however, relies on the later version of the Grimms' tale ignoring the fact that the Grimms themselves published seven editions of the tale between 1812 and 1857 in which they made significant changes, depending on the anticipated reception. They transformed the real mother into a stepmother only in the fourth edition from 1840 (Križman, 2013, 66–74). In addition, although the father's guilt seems minor compared to that of his wife, he is still complicit in this crime. Zipes acknowledged the Grimms minimized the role of the father as a victimizer, while at the same time they depicted the stepmother

as aligned with the witch who wanted to devour the children (Zipes, 1997, 197). Quite the contrary, he consents to abandon the children as early as in the version from the Ölenburg manuscript, while the Grimms afterwards even increased the father's guilt in the version from the second large edition from 1819 by adding to the text that the father fastens a branch to a tree and the banging noise it makes tricks the children into believing that he is chopping wood.

An earlier tale written by Giambattista Basile (from his collection of fairy tales *Lo cunto de li cunti*, 1634 and 1636, Naples), "Ninnillo and Nennella" (the names are diminutives for male and female children) speaks of a boy and a girl whose very poor father remarries. His wife insists on getting rid of the children because of the great famine. The father feels sorry for the children, but takes them to the woods as his wife has ordered. The message conveyed by the tale is that the introduction of step-parent will do more harm than good to the family.

The representation of her bad deeds is an important point of the tale, which is expressed in the first two sentences: "Hapless is the man who has children and hopes to take care of them by giving them a stepmother: he brings home the machine of their ruin" (Basile, 2016, 437). There is no witch or ogre in this tale. While the children's father believes his children were eaten by wolves, they were actually found and taken care of by a prince (the boy) and a pirate (the girl). The prince teaches Ninnillo many skills and how to behave in gentile society, thus enabling him to secure a good social position for himself. Nennella is then reunited with her brother and both siblings marry well, as arranged by the prince. Ninnilo and Nennella go through a "civilizing process." The stepmother is punished by being put into a barrel and rolled down a mountain, while the father is very happy to meet his children and lives with them. The tale has an important function of legitimizing the role of nobility. The prince mediates in the lives of ordinary people and helps them establish the proper social order, not by giving them wealth, but by teaching them skills that enable them to arrange a good social position for themselves and build a well-organized and morally appropriate community. At the time of its primary distribution, the tale legitimized the sovereign power of the nobility as the feudal social order was self-imagined.

Basile published his fairy tales in 1642, a good decade later than Thomas Hobbes published *De Cive. Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Society*. In his political philosophy he defined the civil government as the greater good for human society than the law of nature with permanent *bellum omnium contra omnes* – war of all against all. Human societies proceed from lawless nature and the bare "mutual help" to the civil government of the contracted society, in which people consented for the common good and in which the private interest of the individuals might appear to them to be in conflict with the common good, but in which people can live in peace without fear, under the protection of the sovereign (Hobbes, 1987, 87–88). In this early theory of the social contract, Hobbes asserts that sovereign power has the mandate to take care of the social subjects by offering them protection. "Ninnillo and Nennella" reflects the idea of the nobility being

248
 NENNILLO , E NENNELLA .
 TRATTENIMENTO
 OTTAVO
 Della Giornata Quinta .



Giacomo dello Caso avea due Figliuole del primo Matrimonio Nennillo , e Nennella prima di ascendere alle seconde nozze , ed i Figliastri sono tanto odiati dalla Madregna , che dal Padre furono condotti dentro un bosco , ed ivi dispersi l' un dall' altro : Nennillo diviene cortegiano di un Principe , e Nennella gettandosi in mare fù inghiottita da un pesce fatato , è buttata sopra di un scoglio , e dal suo Fratello fù riconosciuta , dal Principe , e maritata riccamente .

Fig. 2.: Illustration of the tale by Giambattista Basile "Nennillo, e Nennella," day v, tale 8 (Basile, 1754, 248).

given the mandate of being the ruling class, which at the same time resists the ancient tripartite ideology of feudal society self-imagined in a hierarchical order with the clergy at the top, nobility in the middle and the working people at the bottom of the social organization (Dumézil, 1958; Duby, 1982).

Hobbes not only stressed the need for the sovereign power of the nobility, but he also identified parents as having sovereign power over their children. Yet, because “dominion,” i.e. the “supreme power” cannot be ascribed to two persons, male and female, “women are invested with the *principall authority*” (Hobbes, 1987, 122). The child belongs to both the mother and the father, but the “original Dominion over *children* belongs to the *Mother*” (Hobbes, 1987, 123). According to Michel Foucault, “Sovereignty took life and let live” (Foucault, 2004, 247). Thus it seems the parents would have the legitimate right to take the lives of the children who belong to them, which also means they may have the right to abandon them. Hobbes focused on the right of the parents over their children and not of the children under the sovereign power of their parents, but he did not consider killing or abandoning children explicitly as a right of the parents. He did, however, write that abandoned children will then belong to any individual who takes them in: “The *Dominion* passes from the *Mother* to others, divers wayes; first, if she quit and forsake her Right by *exposing the child*” (Hobbes, 1987, 123).

“Ninnillo and Nennella” speaks of how the sovereign power of their parents over the children has been withdrawn and instead, the power of the noble class has been implemented, which is also positioned above the sovereign power of the parents in the contracted civil government. The children as social subjects traverse from the sovereign power of their parents within the organization of the family, upwards to the sovereign power of the prince, who, positioned at the top strata of society, also has the right to punish the parents for not offering safety to their children, the minors.

In Basile, the wilderness represents the exile of the protagonists from the contracted society to the natural state, which is a state of war of all against all. The children return to civilization as young adults, the organized contracted society, governed by the sovereign power. The wolf in this regard belongs to the wilderness; the wolf represents the natural state and stands in opposition to the contracted civil society. Accordingly, the wolf can no longer take over the role of a surrogate parent such as in antiquity, because early modern society believed wild animals cannot have a sovereign right over man, while parents and nobility have dominion over children. Wild animals will also not introduce children to the civil society, thus they need a human sovereign to protect and direct them.

Basile’s tale does not correspond to ATU type 327A or ATU type 327, as does the Grimms’ “Hansel and Gretel.” It does not even correspond to the group “Tales of Magic – Supernatural Adversaries.” Still, it contains the motif of parents abandoning their two children, a boy and a girl, and the motif of a path made of food leading back toward home (bran in this case) that is soon eaten up by an animal, a jackass in this case. The first time children return home by the path of ashes made by Ninnillo. This motif might be linked to the ancient Greek motif of Ariadne’s thread of which a variant appears in “Hansel and Gretel” (Böhm-Korff, 1991, 10). Ariadne provided a thread to her lover Theseus so that he could retrace his way out of the labyrinth of the Minotaur.

THE ENLIGHTENED CHILDREN

In “Hansel and Gretel,” the father in the end stays alone with his children and they live “happily ever after.” Zipes argues, this situation is not realistic because such a safe home never was and may never be, especially if the father remarries (Zipes, 2010, 197). However, the difference between the beginning and the end of “Hansel and Gretel” is significant. Not only is the stepmother gone at the end, but the children provide the material basis needed for living. They become family “providers,” they take over the role of their parents. They gain “political sovereignty” as they become social subjects capable of maintaining the *oikos*, home. They become the purveyors of *oekonomia* instead of their incompetent father and a substitute for their dead mother. This is a very relevant Enlightenment message conveyed by “Hansel and Gretel.” Children are the Enlightened, responsible, rational, caretaking social subjects.

Such as the Grimms’ Hansel and Gretel, so is the Little Thumbling of Charles Perrault an Enlightened child capable of taking initiative, making responsible decisions and finding solutions with his rational mind so as to prove him capable of acting autonomously as a social subject in the modern world. Immanuel Kant, who supported the ideas of the French Revolution, i.e. the transfer of sovereignty to the people (Maliks, 2022, 8), published a famous essay “The Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment” in Königsberg (Prussia) in the December 1784 issue of *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, five years before the revolution took place.

He wrote:

Enlightenment is the human being’s emergence from his self-incurred minority. Minority is inability to make use of one’s own understanding without direction from another. This minority is self-incurred when its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. Sapere aude! Have courage to make use of your own understanding! is thus the motto of enlightenment (Kant, 1996, 17).

Hansel and Gretel, but also the Little Thumbling, emerge from their “minority” or nonage, as they show their ability to make use of their own understanding without direction from another. Ninnillo and Nennella as children, on the contrary, do not act as Enlightened social subjects, but depend on the sovereign power of their parents and then other caretakers, finally the prince. In the end Nennillo and Nennella also become their father’s caretakers, but only after they grow up, marry and establish their own social cells, the family, and thus become sovereign social subjects within the social unit of a family.

Charles Perrault’s tale “Little Thumbling” (published in his *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités: Contes de ma mère l’Oye*, Paris, 1697) corresponds a special type in the ATU index, i.e. type ATU 327B “The Brothers and the Ogre.” It contains an ogre who wants to eat children. The story speaks of seven brothers, of

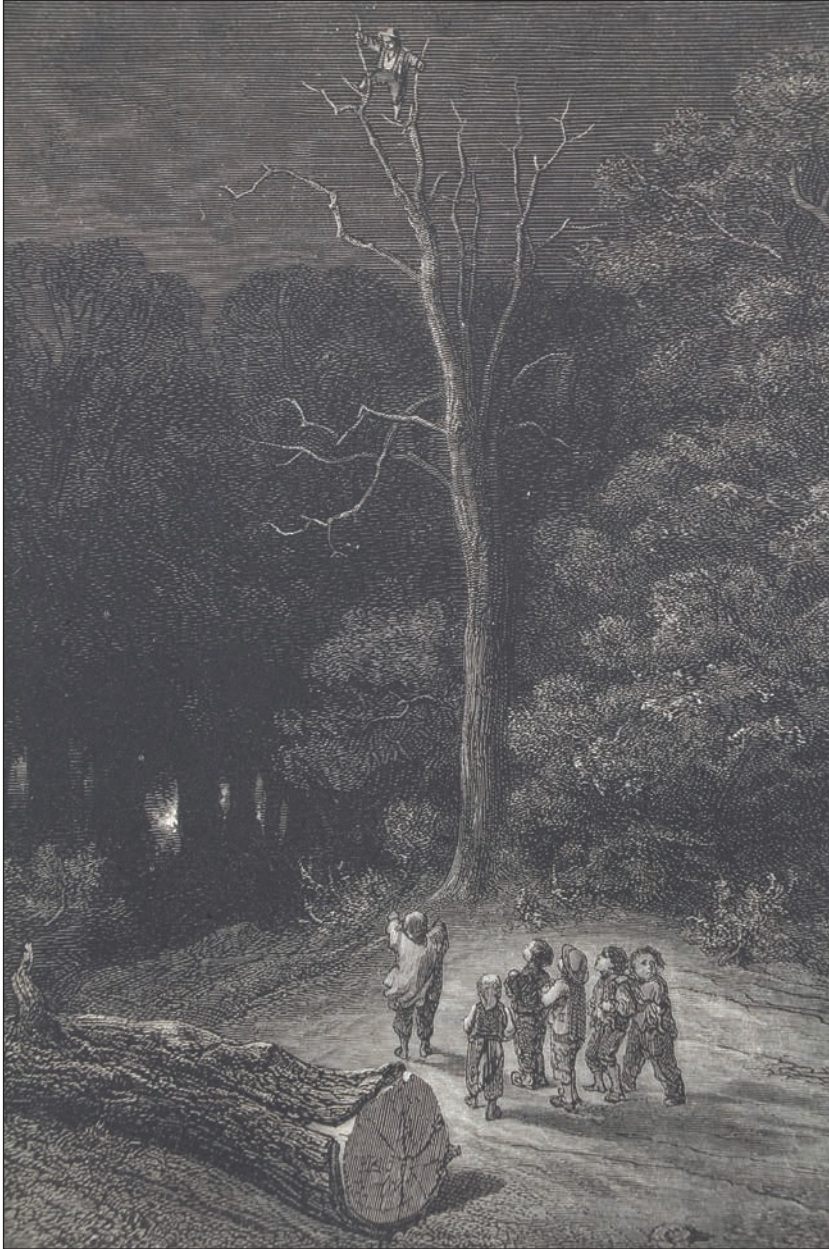


Fig. 3: Gustave Doré, Little Thumbling climbed to the top of a tree to see if he would discover anything, illustration accompanying “Little Thumbling” (Le Petit Poucet) written by Charles Perrault (Perrault, 1862, n.p.).

which the youngest is the smallest and the wisest of all. Because of the great famine, their parents plan to abandon the children. This time, it is on the father's insistence, while the mother resists the idea in the beginning, but soon gives in. The parents take the children to the forest, but with the motif of Ariadne's thread – the Little Thumbling throws pebbles in little bits all along the way –, the children find their way back home. The parents still want to abandon the children and the next time they take them to the thickest and most obscure part of the forest. The Little Thumbling uses bread crumbs this time, but they are soon eaten by the birds. The boys are lost and arrive at the house of an ogress and an ogre. The latter wants to eat them, but he mistakenly kills his own seven daughters instead. The Little Thumbling then tricks the ogress into giving him all the money she and the ogre have. Interestingly, this narration provides an alternative ending in which the boy only steals the boots with which the ogre was catching children. The main message refers to the little boy who is shrewd although nobody recognizes that in the beginning. He brings the salvation to the family. Yet, the tale does not address small children, but parents who might not recognize the treasure hidden in their child. The moral in the end says:

*"No longer are children said to be hardship,
If they possess great charm, good looks, and wit.
If one is weak, and knows not what to say,
Mocked he'll be and chased until he runs far away.
Yet, sometimes it's this child, very least expected,
Who makes his fortune and has his honor resurrected"* (Perrault, 2001, 711).

It is interesting that the moral does not reproach the parents for abandonment as such, but instructs parents not to overlook the potential of a quiet child, as he will run away from them. This sets the initial situation as extreme existential conditions in which the parents cannot support their children and thus force them to find their own way in order to survive. The Little Thumbling manages to overcome existential threats. He is a survivor, the most capable of all when dealing with the difficult challenges of life. He also proves he can take care of others. Ninnillo and Nennella, on the contrary, do not survive on their own, but rely on the sovereign power and security of the prince, while the Grimms' Hansel and Gretel count on the help of God, which perhaps they do receive, but they also empower themselves not only by wit and competence, but also by engaging in some indecorous acts, unlikely to have been at God's direction, as Christianity abhors killing and robbing. The Grimms' tale speaks of the increasing sovereignty of people who tend to organize their lives by themselves.

It is significant that in the "Little Thumbling" the children do not kill the ogre and the tale minimizes Little Thumbling's guilt for stealing by providing an alternative ending in which he does not rob the ogres. If the boy robs the ogres, he improves the economic status of the family, while in the event that he does not, the question remains, why then would the parents happily accept the children back, if they initially abandoned them due to poverty, seeing as how nothing has changed in terms of their economic situation.



Fig. 4: *Hänsel and Gretel* depicted by Alexander Zick (1845–1907), 1880s (Pinterest).

The Grimms, on the contrary, are explicit in these regards: the children kill the witch who had captured them and they rob her. Their father is happy when they return home, his wife having died in the meantime. By eliminating the negative element, the conditions for acceptance are given, as well as the material goods that the children bring, such as pearls and precious stones, which enable the family to live happily ever after.

At the same time as Perrault, Marie-Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville, Baroness d'Aulnoy, included the motif of abandoned children in the fairy tale "Finette Cendron" (1697), a variant of the Cinderella tale. The king and queen have become impoverished and decide to be rid of their three daughters because they are spoiled and the parents can no longer provide them with the beautiful clothes they want. Finette, the youngest daughter, is a cunning, greedy and ambitious young lady, a survivor, who saves the lives of the girls and succeeds by marrying well, but who also brutally kills an ogress and ogre. Despite this, she is described as the best girl in the world because in the end she does not punish her sisters who had maltreated her. This message referring to Finette's proper behavior, which leads from her victimization to her self-salvation and even heroism is also communicated in the moral, which says one should return good for evil as this is the best revenge (d'Aulnoy, 2001, 467). The French fairy tales of the seventeenth and the eighteenth century have become part of the general civilizing process in the West (Zipes, 2012, 31–33). However, compared to Perrault's tales, d'Aulnoy's fairy tales were generally less suitable to the civilizing process as "the psychogenesis of the adult make-up in civilized society" and the simultaneous "sociogenesis of our 'civilization'" (Elias, 2000, xi).

THE MIMETIC RIVALRY AND THE SCAPEGOAT MECHANISM

The German anecdote writer and dramatist Martin Montanus published a variant of the tale of Hansel and Gretel in the sixteenth century in Tübingen (*Schwankbücher*, 1557–1566, *Gartengesellschaft* cap. 5) titled “A nice history of a woman with two children” (Montanus, 1899, 260–267). The tale speaks of a good poor man with two children, both girls, who remarries. His new wife does not like the little girl Margretlin and wants her dead. The woman devises a conspiracy together with the older daughter to take the little one to the woods and leave her there. The girl is ordered to collect wood – the motif also appears in the Grimms’ tale –, and finds her way home twice with the motif of a thread. The third time she finds a cottage, into which a cow locks her.

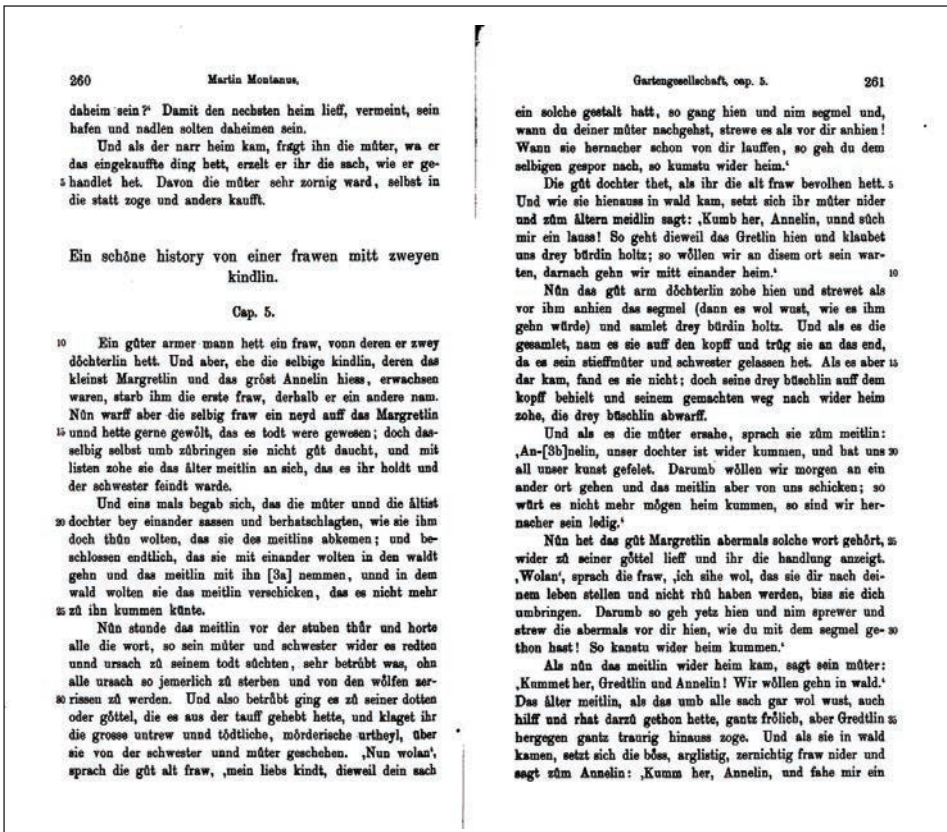


Fig. 5: Martin Montanus, “A nice history of a woman with two children,” *Schwankbücher*, *Gartengesellschaft* cap. 5 (Montanus, 1899, 260–261).

She is then rescued by her sister, the cow is killed and her remains buried as ordered, so that an apple tree grows, the fruit of which can cure a young man. In the end the youngest daughter, her father and the young man leave the stepmother and the older sister. This tale does not explicitly say why the stepmother plans to be rid of the stepdaughter and thus leaves the door open for interpretation. There is however the motif of sibling rivalry present, which is to be found not only in the legend of Romulus and Remus, but also in the baroque fairy tale by d'Aulnoy, "Finnete Cendron," as well, this motif is central to the renaissance fairy tale "Fortunio and the Siren" by Giovanni Francesco Straparola from *The Facetious Nights* (1551/1553), where the motif of abandoning children also appears, but in a different setting. A couple wish to have children but are unable and are determined to adopt a child who they will nurture and treat as if he were their own legitimate son. They went "to a certain spot where young children who had been cast off by their parents were often left, and, having seen there one who appeared to them more seemly and attractive than the rest, they took him home with them, and brought him up with the utmost care and good governance" (Straparola, 1901, 149). After that the couple have a child of their own who calls his adopted brother a bastard and the son of a vile woman. Ruth Bottigheimer detected a note of personal experience from the depth of the pain and psychological exactness with which Straparola described Fortunio's feelings (Bottigheimer, 2002, 53).

These tales by Montanus, Straparola, and d'Aulnoy, address sibling rivalry, as well as the scapegoat mechanism, of which especially illustrative examples are to be found in Roman and Greek antiquity (Palaver, 2013, 159). Mimetic rivalry also appears in the Book of Genesis with the story of Cain and Abel. According to René Girard, "The principal source of violence between human beings is mimetic rivalry, the rivalry resulting from imitation of a model who becomes a rival or of a rival who becomes a model" (Girard, 2001, 11). The rival desires the same object as the subject, wherein "*the subject desires the object because the rival desires it*. In desiring an object the rival alerts the subject to the desirability of the object. The rival, then, serves as a model for the subject [...] in regard to desires" (Girard, 2022, 164) Thus also "Our neighbor is the model for our desires" (Girard, 2001, 11).

Livy described how the two brothers, Romulus and Remus conceived of the idea of building a new city on the very spot where "they were abandoned and reared," yet there was a "hereditary passion" at work, the "thirst to reign" that turned the peaceful enterprise into a criminal conflict. Since it was impossible to choose between the twins, the conflict increased to a collective murder of the "scapegoat," according to Girard, which was needed for the city to be established. "Everything is always equal between twins; there is conflict because there is competition and rivalry. The conflict is caused not by difference but by its absence" (Girard, 1986, 91–92).

This rule of violence between people positions Girard's philosophy in proximity to Thomas Hobbes's notion of the natural state as being a state of permanent war of all against all. The scholar of Girard, Wolfgang Palaver, acknowledges that Girard diverges from Rousseau's faith in the natural goodness of human beings, yet he rejects



Fig. 6: Romulus and Remus breast-fed by she-wolf. Silver didrachm (6.44 g), ca. 269–266 BC (Wikipedia).

“any natural aggressive drive and argues that human beings can overcome their violent nature” and holds the “Jesus’s calls for nonviolence [...] as a plausible, objective, yet very complex attempt to argue for an overcoming of violence” (Palaver, 2013, 35). Contrary to Hobbes’s liberalist political philosophy in defending essential individualism, Girard’s mimetic theory describes man as a social being dependent on relations to others (Palaver, 2013, 36–37). As an example of life outside the rivalry resulting from mimetic desire, Girard believed the love of parents for their children cannot be interpreted as mimetic (Girard, 1996, 28). However, is it possible to interpret tales about abandoned children as cases of mimetic desire?

In the tale written by Montanus, there are two sisters who could be considered rivals for the love of their parent, the father. In addition, the stepmother could also be considered a rival for the man’s affection. In this rivalry, the stepmother joins forces with the older daughter in the attempt to get rid of the youngest daughter, who becomes the “scapegoat.” Yet the collective “murder” of the scapegoat does not take place and the family finally fell apart and a new family is to be established. The youngest daughter leaves the scene together with her father, who abandons his wife and

his older daughter, and goes to live with his daughter and a young man, possibly her future husband. Through the tale, the maturation of the little girl into a young lady is announced, who will soon form her own family and take over the care of her father.

In the tales written by Basile and the Grimms, there is no rivalry between the children. However, in a possible psychoanalytic interpretation, there is a rivalry between the stepmother and the children. As in Montanus' tale, there is a rivalry between the stepmother and the children for her husband's affection. In the tales written by Basile, the Grimms and Montanus, the stepmother is jealous of the children who are loved by their father. Competition is established for the man's affection, instead of the stepmother's taking on a parental relationship towards the children. The stepmother is initially jealous of the dead mother as the model loved by her husband and the mother of his children. The stepmother competes with the children's mother for the man's affection, although the mother is no longer alive. The figure of the dead mother as the model who gained the love of a man, is now transferred to the children as her progeny. In the end of the tale by Montanus, the cow that represents the dead mother's sanctuary for the little girl, dies, the parents' protection of their daughter has been withdrawn, and a new tree grows that produces fruit which cures a young man who leaves with the girl, suggesting they are capable of producing the fruit of their union. Accordingly, the little girl takes over the role her mother once had, as she will become the dominator of family yet to be established.

In the Grimms' "Hansel and Gretel" there is another transmission, i.e. of the father to his son. He aims to play a similar role for the girl as his father should, which is to safeguard his children, the "minors." In this seemingly patriarchal setting there are switches that speak of the contrary, of the male inability to take care of their family thus proving the mother's dominion in the organization of the family. The male fails to represent the sovereign in the formation of the family. There is the father who fails to take care of his children and fails to protect them from the existential danger originating from mimetic rivalry. In the end, the father does not become more competent so as to be the provider for the family; he is released from the role of being the caretaker of his children and the children take over the role of care-giving. The father thus utterly fails to fulfil the role of the family safeguard and the dominator. His son, the little brother, repeatedly calms his sister down, telling her that everything will be alright, with or without God's help, depending on the version.² He also looks for solutions to the motif of Ariadne's thread, but these prove to be unsuccessful. First, because they take the children back home where nothing has changed and the abandonment repeats, and second, because he also fails to make a path which is not eaten by animals. The witch locks the boy in a cage, disables him from his mission to protect his sister in a similar manner as the stepmother has disabled her husband from taking care of his children. The witch orders the little sister to collaborate in her attempt to kill the boy. Finally, a twist follows with the little sister solving the situation by killing the

2 The Grimms' not only significantly extended or "polished," but also Christianized the fifth version of the tale from 1843 (Križman, 2013, 66–72).

witch. The little sister as the symbolic embodiment of the absent good mother, the dominator of the family, removes the negative element, the witch and at the same time the stepmother, who, as the story is composed, is dead by the time the children return home. The mimetic rivalry took place between the figures of the stepmother and the dead wife/mother through her children, so that the rivalry ended by killing the witch/stepmother instead of the children. All the tales containing the mimetic rivalry end with ending the rivalry, possibly by the death or exile of the rival.

CONCLUSION

Although the tales were written by the Grimms, Perrault and Basile, and possibly Montanus, they supposedly originated from the peasantry. They were educated men who were not members of the lowest social strata. One might therefore leave room for the interpretation of the motif of abandoned children as it appears in their tales as a symbolized situation of extreme existential challenges which force young people to find their way through life without the support of their parents, as imagined by the educated writers. Many people in the post-second world war European countries were still facing great poverty, but still, the post-war generation of peasantry did not see their children as a burden to be abandoned, but quite the contrary, the children represented social security for the parents and the family as a whole. Couples would often have several children, as child-mortality rates were high. Children were considered not only descendants who would take over the farm after their parents' deaths, but also work the land. In addition, children are guaranteed care-givers for their parents when they become old, especially when they could not rely on the support of the state. Some children would leave home young, while others would stay and take over the farm, gradually unburdening older parents and taking care of them. Having more children would therefore represent having more social security, which at first glance might seem exactly the opposite of the motif of the abandonment of children.

The motif of abandoned children as it appears in the discussed tales shows that one cannot read the contents of fairy tales in a literal fashion. The motifs that have been molded for centuries have become heavily loaded with meaning. At the same time, each singular edition of the tale with this motif reflects the society in which it was produced, or rather its mentality. The discussed cases show the fairy tales convey very different messages to the anticipated addressees, although they appear quite similar in their structure and share motifs and were perhaps even classified as the same type of tale. Basile primarily addressed men who were not to expect good care for their children from their wife if they remarry, while at the same time he advocated for the contracted civil society and the sovereign political power of the nobility. Perrault advised parents not to neglect their seemingly weak and quiet children, as they might have the potential to act as Enlightened social subjects who will at some point offer their parents social security. The Grimms' children were not only Enlightened social subjects, but also capitalist individuals who ensured the material conditions needed to live.

»JANKO IN METKA«: ZAPUŠČENA OTROKA POSTANETA RAZSVETLJENA
DRUŽBENA SUBJEKTA*Polona TRATNIK*

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POVZETEK

Pravljica »Janko in Metka«, ki sta jo napisala Jacob in Wilhelm Grimm, se začne s presunljivo odločitvijo staršev, da zapustita svoje otroke. Izvore motiva so preučevali glede na družbenozgodovinske okoliščine, vendar je motiv zapuščenih otrok v evropski mitologiji in pravljicnem izročilu pravzaprav zelo pogost in sega v antiko. ATU ljudska pravljica tipa 327A se ne pojavi šele v devetnajstem stoletju pri bratih Grimm, ampak že prej, v sedemnajstem in celo v šestnajstem stoletju. Avtorica zagovarja trditev, da razlike v tem, kako otroka oziroma otroci preživijo svoje izgnanstvo, odražajo spremembe v tem, kako je sodobna družba pojmovala svojo organizacijo. Zgodnja baročna zgodba, ki jo je napisal Giambattista Basile, govori o civilni družbi z zgodnjo moderno družbeno pogodbo in legitimira suvereno oblast, medtem ko poznejše različice, ki so jih napisali Charles Perrault in brata Grimm, prikazujejo razsvetljene družbene subjekte, ki so sposobni iziti iz svoje nedoletnosti. Pomembna razsežnost legende o Romulu in Remu iz rimske antike, ki vključuje tudi motiv zapuščenih otrok, predstavlja mimetično rivalstvo. Avtorica pokaže, na kakšen način se mimetično rivalstvo pojavlja v sodobnih pravljicah, ne le v baročnih, ampak že v zgodbi iz šestnajstega stoletja, ki jo je zapisal Martin Montanus.

Ključne besede: pravljica, Janko in Metka, Jacob in Wilhelm Grimm, Charles Perrault, Giambattista Basile, Martin Montanus, razsvetljenstvo

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